

REMARKS

This application has been carefully reviewed in light of the Office Action dated February 7, 2005. Claims 1, 3, 5, 7 to 12 and 14 to 20 are pending in the application, of which Claims 1, 3, 5, 12 and 19 are independent. Reconsideration and further examination are respectfully requested.

The title was objected to as not being descriptive. A new title is submitted herein which is believed to be clearly indicative of the invention to which the claims are directed. Withdrawal of the objection to the title is therefore respectfully requested.

Claim 4 was rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) over U.S. Patent No. 5,845,065 (Conte). Claims 1 to 3 and 50 to 20 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) over U.S. Patent No. 6,809,831 (Minari) and Conte. Reconsideration and withdrawal of these rejections are respectfully requested.

The present invention concerns a networked image forming system including a server and a plurality of imaging forming devices. The system further includes a licensing mechanism which controls job processing restrictions in accordance with the number of devices connecting to the server and the number of image forming devices connecting the server.

Turning to specific claim language, amended independent Claim 1 is directed to an image forming system including a server and client computers connected to a network, one or a plurality of image forming devices connected to either the network or the server, and devices of which one or a plurality can be connected to the server and which can be recognized by the server. The system includes input means for inputting to the server a job to be printed by an image forming device, rendering means for rendering the job input by the input means into an image, output means for outputting an image rendered by the rendering means to an image

forming device specified by the job, setting means for setting the specified image forming device as an output destination at the server, output destination information holding means for holding a number of image forming devices set as output destinations by the setting means, recognizing means for recognizing a presence of devices connected to the server, and a number thereof connected, and comparison means for comparing a number N of the devices connected to the server that have been recognized by the recognizing means, and a number M of image forming devices already set as output destinations by the holding means, when the specified image forming device is set as an output destination by the setting means. In an event that the comparison means judges M to be less than N, setting of the specified image forming device as the output destination is permitted, and the number of image forming devices set as output destinations held by the holding means is updated, and, in an event that the comparison means judges N and M to be equal, setting of the specified image forming device as the output destination is not permitted.

In contrast, Minari is directed to a print processing system capable of continuing the processing of a print job by a replaced printer even in the case where the processing of the print job is discontinued. The print processing system operates in a network environment including a plurality of printers, such as printers 107 and 108 of FIG. 1 of Minari. The print processing system includes a print processing program (of FIG. 6) having a status obtaining program 604. As acknowledged in the Office Action, Minari fails to disclose use of a licensing system within the print processing system.

Conte discloses a license compliance apparatus coupled to a network that monitors launching of software applications by clients on the network. Each time a software application is launched, the client requests a license from the license compliance apparatus based

on availability of a license for the software application. However, nowhere is Conte seen to disclose comparing a number of devices, N , connected to a server that have been recognized by a recognizing means, and a number, M , of image forming devices already set as output destinations by a holding means, when a specified image forming device is set as an output destination by a setting means. Furthermore, Conte does not disclose, in the event that the comparison judges M to be less than N , setting of the specified image forming device as the output destination is permitted, and the number of image forming devices set as output destinations held by the holding means is updated, and, in an event that the comparison judges N and M to be equal, setting of the specified image forming device as the output destination is not permitted.

As the cited references, neither alone nor in combination, neither disclose nor suggest at least the feature of, in the event that a comparison judges M , the number of image forming devices already set as output destinations, to be less than N , the number of devices connected to a server that have been recognized by a recognizing means, setting of the specified image forming device as the output destination is permitted, and the number of image forming devices set as output destinations held by the holding means is updated, and, in an event that the comparison judges N and M to be equal, setting of the specified image forming device as the output destination is not permitted, Applicant submits that amended independent Claim 1 is now in condition for allowance and respectfully requests same.

Independent Claim 3 is directed to an image forming system including a server and client computers connected to a network, one or a plurality of image forming devices connected to either the network or the server, and devices of which one or a plurality can be connected to the server and which can be recognized by the server. The image forming system comprises: input means for inputting to said the server a job to be printed by an image forming

device; rendering means for rendering the job inputted by said input means into an image; output means for outputting an image rendered by said rendering means to an image forming device specified by the job; setting means for setting the specified image forming device as an output destination at the server; output destination information holding means for holding a number of image forming devices set as output destinations by said setting means; and recognizing means for recognizing a presence of devices connected to the server and a number thereof connected, wherein the server constantly or periodically recognizes the number of devices connected to the server using said recognizing means, and compares a number n of recognized devices with a number m of image forming devices set as output destinations held in said output destination information holding means, and, in an event that n is judged to be less than m , a number of image forming devices for distributing and outputting jobs is restricted to at most the number n of recognized devices, or no jobs are output.

As in the system of Claim 1, the image forming system of Claim 3 restricts access to a device based on comparing the number of connected devices to the number of image forming devices. Specifically, Claim 3 provides for the server constantly or periodically recognizing the number of devices connected to the server using a recognizing means, and comparing a number n of recognized devices with a number m of image forming devices set as output destinations held in an output destination information holding means, and, in an event that n is judged to be less than m , a number of image forming devices for distributing and outputting jobs is restricted to at most the number n of recognized devices, or no jobs are output. Neither Minari nor Conte disclose these features.

As the cited references, neither alone nor in combination, neither disclose nor suggest at least the feature of comparing a number n of recognized devices with a number m of image forming devices set as output destinations held in an output destination information holding means, and, in an event that n is judged to be less than m , a number of image forming devices for distributing and outputting jobs is restricted to at most the number n of recognized devices, or no jobs are output, Applicant submits that independent Claim 3 is now in condition for allowance and respectfully requests same.

Amended Claim 5 is directed to an image processing device for outputting image data to a plurality of image forming devices, said image processing device. The image processing device comprises: input means for inputting an image forming job, wherein one of the plurality of image forming devices is specified as an output destination; image processing means for generating image data for the specified image forming device based on the image forming job; image output means for outputting image data generated by said image processing means to the specified image forming device; connecting means for connecting to one or a plurality of devices; and control means for restricting a number of image forming devices capable of receiving image data outputted from said image output means, of the plurality of image forming devices, based on a number of devices connected to said connecting means, wherein, in an event that the number of devices connected to said connecting means is less than a number of the plurality of image forming devices, said control means selects a number of image forming devices corresponding to a difference in these numbers, and forbids image data outputted from said image output means from going to the selected image forming devices.

As in the system of Claim 1, the image processing device of Claim 5 restricts access to a device based on comparing the number of devices to which access has already been granted to the number of total devices. Specifically, Claim 5 provides for, in an event that the number of devices connected to a connecting means is less than a number of a plurality of image forming devices, the control means selects a number of image forming devices corresponding to a difference in these numbers, and forbids image data outputted from said image output means from going to the selected image forming devices. Neither Minari nor Conte disclose such a feature.

As the cited references, neither alone nor in combination, neither disclose nor suggest at least the feature of, in an event that the number of devices connected to a connecting means is less than a number of a plurality of image forming devices, the control means selects a number of image forming devices corresponding to a difference in these numbers, and forbids image data outputted from said image output means from going to the selected image forming devices, Applicant submits that amended independent Claim 5 is now in condition for allowance and respectfully requests same.

Amended independent Claims 12 and 19 are directed to a method and a computer program, respectively, substantially in accordance with the apparatus of Claim 5. As such, Applicant submits that the discussion from above in regard to Claim 5 applies equally to Claims 12 and 19. Accordingly, Applicants submit that Claims 12 and 19 are now in condition for allowance and respectfully requests same.

The other pending claims in this application are each dependent from the independent claims discussed above and are therefore believed patentable for the same reasons. Because each dependent claim is also deemed to define an additional aspect of the invention, however, the individual consideration of each on its own merits is respectfully requested.

In view of the foregoing amendments and remarks, the entire application is believed to be in condition for allowance, and such action is respectfully requested at the Examiner's earliest convenience.

Applicant's undersigned attorney may be reached in our Costa Mesa, CA office at (714) 540-8700. All correspondence should continue to be directed to our below-listed address.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Frank L. Cire', written over a horizontal line.

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